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SPOTLIGHT: ALFRED BRANDON SLEPT HERE

BY TAGALIE HEISTER

MEDICAL CENTER LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Hospital and academic health science librarians from 1965 to 2002 relied upon the Brandon/Hill Selected Lists as the main authority for basic collection development in health science libraries. First authored by Alfred Brandon and, after his death in 1996, continued by Dorothy Hill and Henry Stickell, the list provided hospitals and small libraries with recommendations for those core books and journals that all medical libraries should own. While the “Brandon Lists” – as they were familiarly called – are well-known to health science librarians, the association between Alfred Brandon and the University of Kentucky’s College of Medicine is probably not so well-known. Alfred Brandon was the first medical library director at the University of Kentucky.

Mr. Brandon originally studied at Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts to become a Seventh-day Adventist minister. As a student he worked in the college library. Upon graduation, he moved to Canada where he served as a minister but returned after a year-and-a-half to take the position of assistant librarian at Atlantic Union. It was there where he first met and worked with Dorothy Hill who became a life-long friend and collaborator. Mr. Brandon obtained a bachelor of science in library science degree from Syracuse University in 1948 and a masters in library science from the University of Illinois in 1951. He was working

at the Transportation Library at the University of Michigan when he was recruited by the Loma Linda University library system in California. While there he was responsible for the development of the original dental library, his first but far from last, experience in designing a library and establishing a new library collection.



Alfred Brandon, 1955. Portrait Print Collection (University of Kentucky)

Hired prior to the 1960 opening of the University of Kentucky’s College of Medicine, Alfred Brandon was charged with building a medical library from the ground up to support the colleges of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and nursing. One can only imagine this assignment as both exciting and daunting, especially from our current perspective in which our focus is more on reducing collections than on creating them. Mr. Brandon was one of the original seven faculty members of the University of Kentucky’s College of Medicine. In addition to his role as

director of the library, he was active in the development of the new college and was involved in interviewing potential faculty. With a budget of \$500,000, he designed and staffed the new library and amassed a respectable health sciences collection which was housed in the still extant Medical Center Library. The collection boasted a thoroughly scholarly scope with many foreign language titles and a complete collection of all the state medical journals.



Alfred Brandon, 1958. Portrait Print Collection (University of Kentucky)

While Mr. Brandon was library director at the University of Kentucky Medical Center Library he created the first subject list of medical journals, a time-consuming undertaking that meant working after his normal hours, on Sundays, and often “until midnight” (Morgan 71). Building on Mr. Brandon’s original document, the National Library of Medicine took over this work and published it annually as the *Subject List of Journals Indexed in Index Medicus*. Mr. Brandon served as director at the University of Kentucky until 1963 when he moved to Baltimore to become the Director of the Welch Medical Library at Johns Hopkins University.

During his time in Kentucky Mr. Brandon had the idea to create and publish a list of recommended core book and journal titles for small medical libraries (Hill) but it was not until he moved to Baltimore that he actually completed that project. Having twice been through the process of developing new medical libraries, Mr. Brandon must have been acutely aware of the dearth of assistance available to medical librarians for selecting essential materials for their libraries. Prior to the “Brandon Lists” the only authoritative lists of this sort available to librarians were the ones sporadically published by the American Medical Association between 1940 and 1959. Mr. Brandon’s first list, the “Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library,” was published in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* in 1965 (Brandon). During his tenure at Johns Hopkins, Mr. Brandon also served as the editor of the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* (1963-1965) and from 1965-1966 served as President of the Medical Library Association (MLA). He was awarded the Janet Doe Lectureship in 1969, which recognizes annually a member who has made exceptional contributions in the area of history or philosophy of medical librarianship.

And in 1977 he won the Marcia C. Noyes Award, the “highest professional distinction award” given by MLA, which recognizes “a career which has resulted in lasting, outstanding contributions to health science librarianship” (Medical Library Association).

In 1966 he became the chairman of the Department of Library Science at the new Mount Sinai School of Medicine, where he turned a hospital library collection into that of an academic medical library and designed a new state-of-the-art library facility overlooking Central Park. In 1973 he accepted his last full-time library position as the librarian of the New York Academy of Medicine and director of the New York and New Jersey Regional Medical Library Program. After retiring from that position in 1978, Mr. Brandon moved to Florida but was employed part-time by Majors Scientific Books with whom he continued his work on the recommended book lists for medicine, nursing and allied health, and on whose behalf he attended regional and national medical library meetings.

Mr. Brandon died in 1996 in Daytona Beach. His obituary in the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* noted: “His many contributions, including leadership of the Medical Library Association (MLA), development and nurturing of medical librarians, and contributions to librarianship in general, are noteworthy and of lasting significance” (Morgan 72). None of the librarians currently working at the University of Kentucky Medical Center Library worked with Mr. Brandon, but his presence is in all that is around us as we work in the facility that he designed. Hopefully, we honor him well by the work that we do within these walls.

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